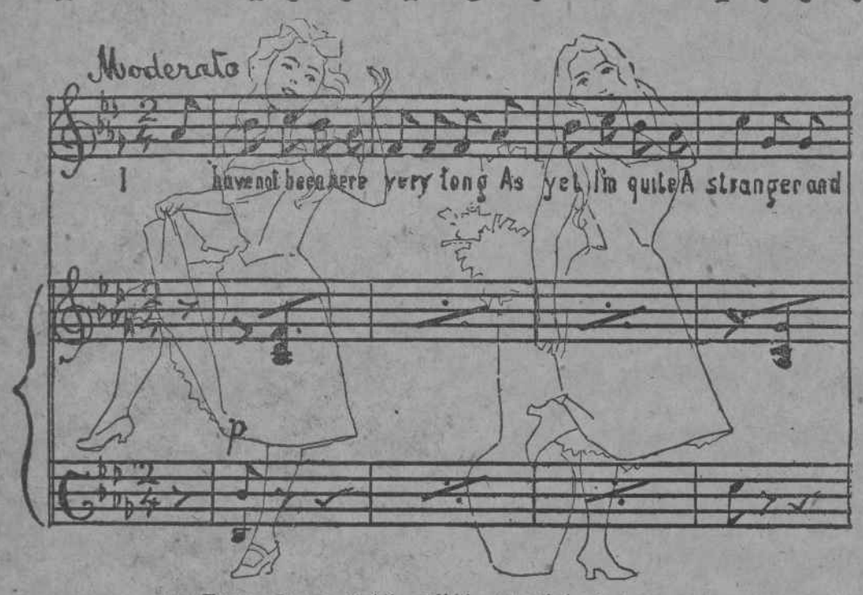
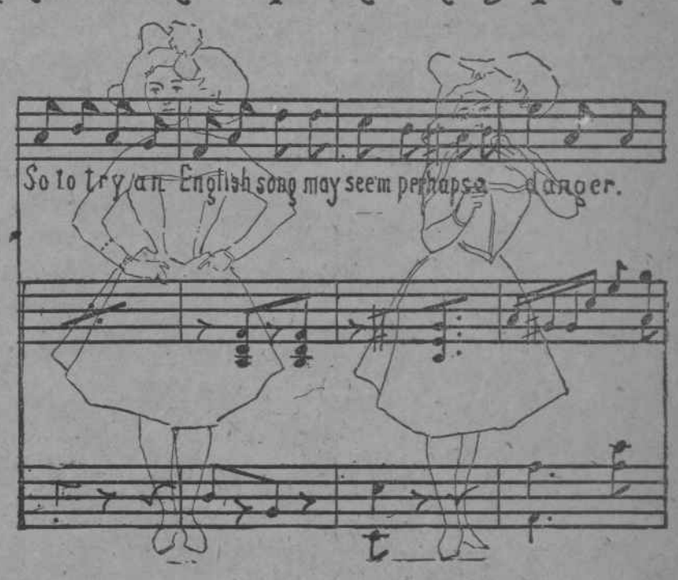
MLLE. ANNA HELD RECEIVES ALAN DALE, ATTIRED IN A "NIGHTIE."



From Anna Held's Little English Song.



BE STILL, my heart. Cease thy fond, yet nervous flutterings. I give myself all sorts of good advice. I deliberately think of "the loved ones at home"—and all that sort of thing. It is no use, and as I enter the Hotel Netherland, with the certain knowledge that ten minutes later I shall be in the fragrant intimacy of Mlle. Anna Held's boudoir—my auricles and my ventricles say—pit-a-pat, and pit-a-pat again. How difficult it is to be un-saucy on missions such as these! "I am out for Art—with a capital A—and not for pleasure," I tell myself sternly, paternally. But art is glacial, and Mlle. Anna Held, whose ditties I heard at the Palace, in London, can never suggest the refrigerator. Then I add—business is business, but am oppressed by the certainty that sometimes it is, and very often it isn't.

Mr. Mann takes me upstairs, and Mr. Ziegfeld accompanies us. Neither speaks a word of French, so that I am not mortally afraid. I know that Anna can say more to me in ten minutes—if she chooses to do so—than she can tell them in ten hours, and I bless the education that took me away from Ollendorfianism. "The hat of my sister is round, and my brother's penknife is sharp," is effective, but non-useful, under circumstances such as those by which I find myself surrounded.

"Mademoiselle is bathing just now," says Mr. Mann, as we enter her parlor. "Shall you mind very much if she is not able to titivate herself in order to receive you. I am afraid that you will see her en negligé. What a pity!"

"Not at all! Not at all," I declared magnanimously. "I would not derange mademoiselle for anything in the world. Beg her not to trouble herself on my account! As negligé as possible. I don't mind!"

It's no use being selfish. Why should I trouble Anna Held to tog herself up in war paint and furbelows? A pretty woman is a pretty woman always. Besides, there is no prudery about my constitution. The dread nervousness comes on again, however. Once more I resolve not to forget the loved ones at home.

"Entrez, monsieur," says a little lisping voice within—trainante as that of Sarah Bernhardt when she is cajoling her Armand Duval, "Entrez, done, et—excusez moi, je vous en prie,"

The intimacy of the boudoir at last! The atmosphere is freighted with the scent of pink roses, and an enervating tiedeur is distinctly fascinating. In an armchair, manicuring her fingers, sits Mlle. Anna Held—the Held of the lovely photographs, the lady who had her name on all the London buses. She is very much en negligé, and one eye is hidden by a huge white bandage—the other, however, being large enough and limpid enough to do duty for the two. She is attired in—oh! how can I say it?—how can I say it?—a nightie, filmy with laces and gewgaws, over which she has thrown a pink bathrobe that is more comfortable than it is comely. The nightie is almost hidden, but not quite. And she is not in the least embarrassed about it. Why should she be? There are no prowling prudes in this country.

Mlle. Held rises and surveys me carefully. Then she says, "Ah, monsieur. You so strikingly resemble a monsieur I knew in Paris. His name was Calumet. He adored me, and—I adored him. He is married now."

Do I like that? Well, what do you think? I begin to believe that I can't be so bad after all, and I pluck up courage to carefully scrutinize Mlle. Held. It would be absurd to call her attractive, because she is merely insinuating. Her large eye (I can see but one) dwells upon you with a singularly magnetic fervor. Her teeth are regular, white and slightly prominent. Her hands are soft, caress-inspiring and dainty, while her feet are Mendelssohn's songs without words. And, to my mind, the nightie is more becoming than silks and satins and spangles could possibly be. There are worse garbs on earth than nighties. Turn not up thy nose, neither sniff, at the unaffected and poetic nightie.

"I am a fright," she says. "Do not look at my robe de nuit, I beg you, monsieur—do not look at it. And I regret so much that a bandage covers my eye. I have been bitten by a beast of an insect—a mosquito. My maid found its wings in my bed this morning. Is it not sad? I receive you, quand-meme. You must be satisfied with one eye. Do not write that Mlle. Anna Held is hideous and mosquito-bitten. I am afraid of your journalists. They tell everything."

Saucy Anna! Perfectly convinced am I that she reads me like a book—that she sees my expression of placid admiration, and has seen it since its dawn!

"Of course," she goes on, "you cannot tell what I am like, seeing me as I now am. I am really a very charming little woman—tout ce qu'il y a de plus gentille. I am soft, and feline, and gentle, and, oh! so amiable!"

She laughs at her own candor, and I like it immensely. Women, as a rule, know what they are, but let you find it out for yourself. Mlle. Held saves you all that trouble. She is frank, and naive with it all.

"I am very young," says Anna. "I don't need any art to make myself so. I am—guess my age!"

The question overwhelms me. A fervent desire not to put my foot in it takes possession of me. I cannot insult her by suggesting eighteen, and it would be sheer idiocy—blind idiocy—to verge upon the thirties.

"Twenty-four," I say nobly.

"No"—she can be very petulant when she likes—"I am not twenty-four. I am much less. You are a bad judge of age. My friend, whom you resemble, would never have made such a guess. Enfin! I am young, but my songs are not. My songs are naughty—oh, so naughty—but everybody likes them. They have been successful everywhere."

I am a trifle startled at this. Yvette Guilbert sang piggeries (which is my translation of cochoneries), but never admitted it. Decidedly, Anna Held is ingenuous.

"Mais oui," she resumes. "Those who go to hear ditties don't want to imagine themselves at the grand mass. It would be senseless, n'est ce-pas? I sing suggestively, and I tell you so. It is my object. I try to capture the men, and I succeed, though I also capture the women. I sing softly, cattily and languorously. I am persistently languorous. All my gestures are carefully studied, and they mean much. I do not wish men to remain chilly—ugh! I hate cold!—while I am singing. They must be all fervor, all enthusiasm, all warmth. That is my object. It is a good object—do you not think so? I have two hundred songs, and they are all my own creations. Some of them are comic—some of them are not. You ask me what my method is. I say it is suggestive. It is not coarse; it is not rude; it is not shocking—but it is an appeal, and an appeal that has never yet failed."

I glance at the uncomprehensive Ziegfeld, and I wonder if he really understands his Anna Held. I am charmed with her candor. It is so refreshing, after the inane airs and frills of Yvette Guilbert. All Guilbert's songs—let her tell the story—are art pure and simple, character descriptions, vivid Paris pictures, everything that they really are not. This audacious little Held woman, whose ditties are not one jot worse than those of Yvette, sails under no false colors. Everybody who heard her in London knew that she was not telling stories about Mary and her little lamb, or tiny Goody-two-shoes. A woman who hasn't the courage of her convictions is not worth making a fuss about.

"You have heard Yvette Guilbert?" I ask timidly.

"Bien sur," she answers readily. I am very fond of Yvette. She is a good comrade, but—but, well, remember (with a look of menace in that one gleaming orb) "I do not say anything from jealousy—I do not admire her. She is an artist, yes, but she has no voice. She has diction, that is all. She speaks slowly and distinctly, but she cannot sing. I am very fond of her, though. She is a good fellow."

I smile at the artless femininity of this. I love her—but she cannot sing. Could anything be more archly characteristic of mulicbrity. I thought I would try her further.

"Do you imitate Yvette Guilbert?"

Anna Held burst into laughter. "I imitate Yvette Guilbert! Par example, c'est trop fort! Our genres are very different, and I prefer my own, merci. Yvette is ugly, with nothing but a je ne sais quoi to recommend her. I—well, you should see me on the stage. I have youth. When I left Paris I was a bud just beginning to blossom. They wanted me badly. They were furious at my departure. Paris was like a child to whom you had offered a bonbon and snatched it away. I do not sing Yvette Guilbert's songs. She dare not sing mine. She is going to imitate me in Paris this year at one of the revues. I couldn't imitate her if I would. I am too small and gentle. Yvette's vogue is passing in France, but I like her very much. She is such a good fellow. Chere Yvette!"

Mlle. Held manicures her fingers complacently. She has never lost her equanimity. She is perfectly sure of herself, and there is not a ripple of excitement in the languor of her voice.

"I have been so busy since I arrived that I have had very little time to myself," she vouchsafes. "I had a funny experience in your Bois de Boulogne yesterday. I call that the Bois," she says pointing to the green stretch of park that leaves the rattle and turmoil of Fifty-ninth street. "I was driving with Mr. Ziegfeld when I caught sight of two Parisians whom I have seen countless times in Paris. Ah, que c'etait drole! They almost fell from their carriage. They tried to speak to me, but—although I am amiable (coquettishly) I draw the line occasionally. I drew it at them. I whipped up the horses and off we flew. They followed, and we had a racé through the Bois, and right down to the Herald Square Theatre, where I alighted. Were they chagrined? Well, I should think they were. Their names I do not know, but it was the oddest thing in the world for me to encounter two of my old Frenchmen en plen New York.' '

Mlle. Held permits me to inspect the glowing gowns that her nymph-like form is to grace next week. Pink satins and black satins and blue satins, short to the knees, hang in limp inertia in a little cubby leading from her boudoir.

"I get them at reduced prices," she tells me, still sweetly ingenuous, "because the dressmakers like me to wear them. Still, I pay as much as 1,500 francs for a dress, which is quite enough, n'est-ce pas? I wear very little underneath. I can show you no lingerie, although I own splendid linen that I wear chez moi. My dresses are all short. Why shouldn't they be? If a woman possesses a neat jambe, I can see no reason why she should be afraid to show it. Do not say that I am shock-eeng. I am most natural. I do not believe in affectation. In London there is so much affectation. Figurez vous that one day I donned my Paris bicycle costume, a short jupon with pantaloons, and started out for a ride. I am fond of bicycling, as I am of all sports. I was hooted, the gamins ran after me. Vite-ment I cycled back to my hotel and no more did I venture out in my Parisian costume. Yet there was nothing outre about it. In London I saw dresses that were far worse, but prejudice had set them down as proper. C'est bete, n'est-cepas?

I relapse into a series of affirmations. I say "oui" to every "n'est-ce pas?" that she suggests. I am really surprised at myself. If she had declared that Zola should be used for primer reading in all the public schools, I should have said "oui." I have come to the conclusion that I am the very worst sort of person to understand sirens. I should be shocked, ebobi, frenzied with virtuous indignation, but there I sit laughing in keenest enjoyment at Anna Held's audacities, and enjoying them all. Where are the loved ones at home?

"You must promise me one thing," she remarks, as I begin to think of tearing myself away, "and that is, that you will applaud me ferociously Monday night. Let me look at your hand."

I give her a flabby paw, and she takes it in her fingers and examines it. "You are all right," she asserts. "You have strength. You can applaud. I am nervous, you see. Perhaps Americans will not like me. In that case I shall be utterly heart-broken. I shall go back weary of life, and of everything. I say to myself, 'I have never failed.' I read my 'notices' for confidence and hope—but still I am afraid. Everybody here has been very gentil to me so far. I amuse myself immensely. I have been to the theatres and to the Bois. Nothing could be more agreeable. Please say that I am a quiet, domesticated little woman—very kind and very affable."

As a picture of domesticity I cannot help thinking that Anna Held is a gigantic fiasco. Perhaps if I had not taken her by surprise she would have greeted me crocheting or tatting. I hardly think so, though. As I have already endeavored to show, Mlle. Held is not anxious to be considered what she isn't.

"What French artist has met with the greatest success in America?" she asks, abruptly.

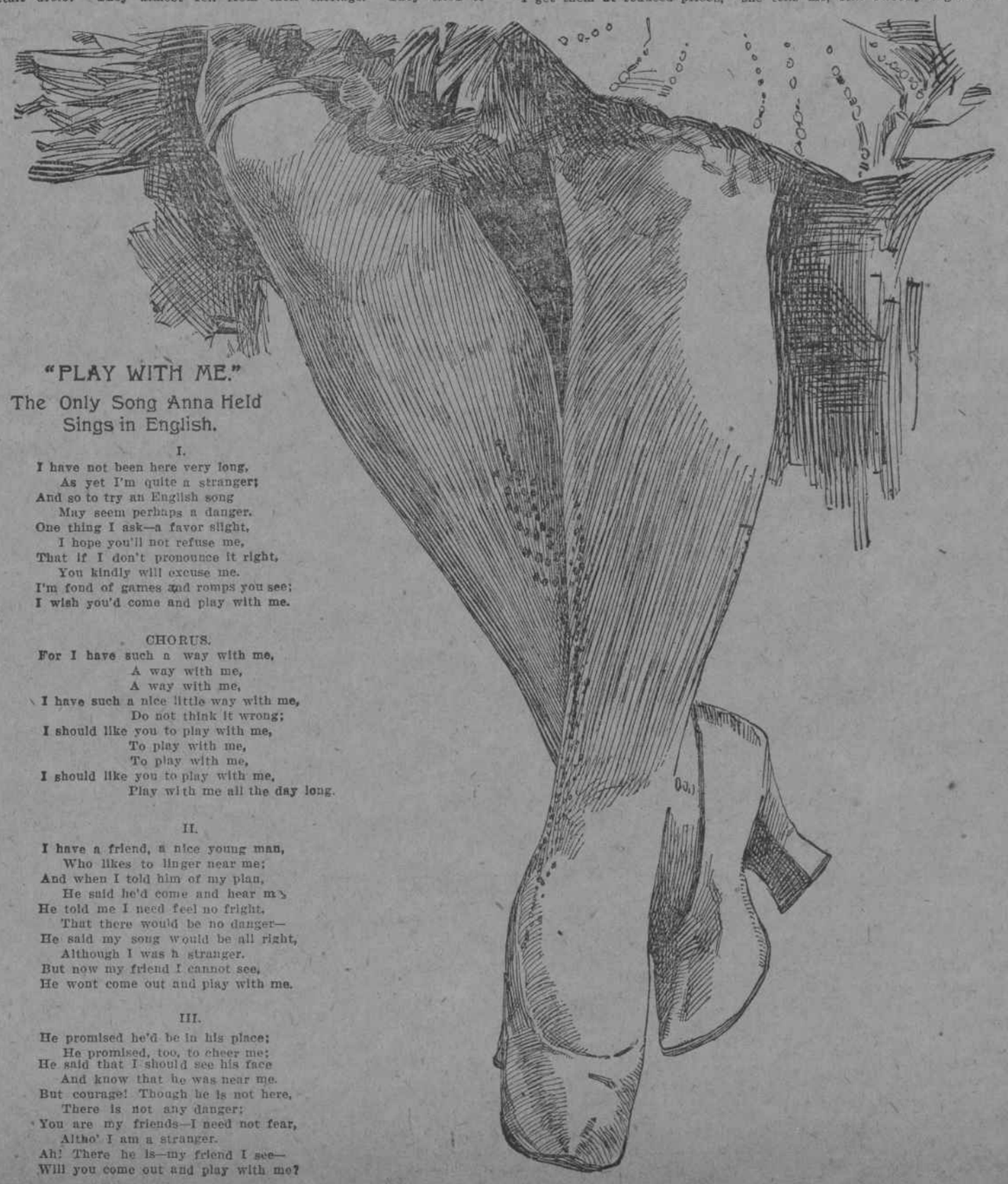
I tell her that her most successful compatriot has been Sarah Bernhardt.

"Ah, yes," she sighs, "Sarah is great. She is an artist, for she knows how to conceal her age so cleverly. She is vieille—vieille—but she looks young and lovely. I admire Sarah very keenly."

I ask her if she is married, and she laughs. "I am not married," she says but I am a marier. Perhaps I shall meet some rich American to wh(can take a fancy. I am told that rich Americans exist. Why should I marry, though? I have all I want—a lovely house in Paris, carriages and horses—everything a woman can desire.

I see Mr. Mann and Mr. Ziegfeld looking a trifle uneasy. I have been listening to Anna Held for a long time. Perhaps they realize my danger—perhaps they want a little of it themselves. At any rate I give her a parting hand, and lifting her bandage she allows both her eyes to rest upon me.

Thank goodness for that disabled eye! With both of them let loose upon me I should never have lived to tell the tale. ALAN DALE.



"PLAY WITH ME."

The Only Song Anna Held Sings in English.

I.

I have not been here very long,
As yet I'm quite a stranger;
And so to try an English song
May seem perhaps a danger.
One thing I ask—a favor slight,
I hope you'll not refuse me,
That if I don't pronounce it right,
You kindly will excuse me.
I'm fond of games and romps you see;
I wish you'd come and play with me.

CHORUS.

For I have such a way with me,
A way with me,
A way with me,
I have such a nice little way with me,
Do not think it wrong;
I should like you to play with me,
To play with me,
To play with me,
I should like you to play with me,
Play with me all the day long.

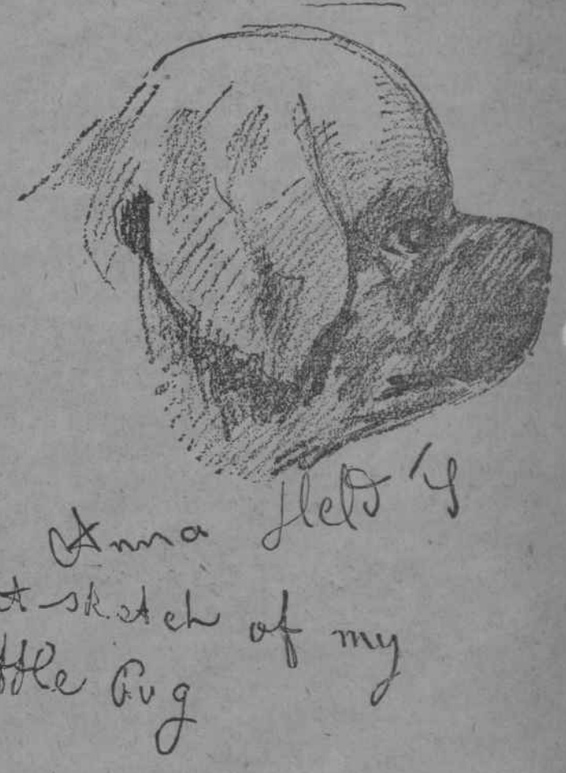
II.

I have a friend, a nice young man,
Who likes to linger near me;
And when I told him of my plan,
He said he'd come and hear me.
He told me I need feel no fright,
That there would be no danger—
He said my song would be all right,
Although I was a stranger.
But now my friend I cannot see,
He wont come out and play with me.

III.

He promised he'd be in his place;
He promised, too, to cheer me;
He said that I should see his face
And know that he was near me.
But courage! Though he is not here,
There is not any danger;
You are my friends—I need not fear,
Altho' I am a stranger.
Ah! There he is—my friend I see—
Will you come out and play with me?

A Letter from Mlle. Anna.



To W. R. Hearst, New York Journal:

I must write you a little story—and about my little dog, for I don't know anybody I love so much. He is the darlingest one in all Paris, and must look very chic to you Americans.

He was given me by my dearest friend in Paris, and was the weentiest, tweentiest little thing that ever I saw. I used to roll him up in a little bundle in the palm of my hand (I wear a number five), and he would give such a funny little grunt and blink his funny little eyes.

Such a time as I had getting him a basket. I spent days in the shops of Paris trying to find one that he would be cozy in. At last I found one in the funniest little old place where they make baskets for babies. It was a round one, that stood on three legs, and was lined with baby blue silk and stuffed with the softest down in all Paris. He did look just too sweet for anything, but one day he leaned too far over the edge, and topple over went doggie, basket and blanket. I have bought him lots of baskets since, but none of them stand on legs. I take as much care of his hair and his toes and teeth as of my own. I take him once a week to the parlors of Leon d'Hunterville, on the Boulevard des Italiens, when he has his perfumed bath and his hair brushed so well, and that dear little puff in the end of his tail is curled. Then his little pearls of "Tuffens" are brushed and his mouth rinsed out with eau de cologne. Then his nails are rubbed with a funny little brush that makes them shine just like mine do. I do love to hug him up close then, for he is just as sweet as a tiny sachet bag. Of course, he goes to the leading tailor's. Monsieur Alphonse de Coquelicat, on the Rue de Rivoli, makes all his clothes. He is real good to stand for his measures, and feels very proud to see himself before the glass in his new coat.

Every day he goes out for a drive with me and takes a little nap afterward on the couch beside me. He has lovely collars. His everyday one is of plain gold, with "My Doggie," in turquoise on it. Then he has a dress one of rolled gold plate, with six tiny diamond stars on it. He only wears that one when he goes out with me. ANNA HELD.